

REMARKS OF FCC COMMISSIONER ROBERT M. McDOWELL

**MEDIA INSTITUTE DINNER
WASHINGTON, D.C.
October 16, 2006**

Thank you Chairman Wiley, members of the Media Institute and distinguished guests. My bride, Jennifer, and I thank you for your kind invitation to speak at this evening's gala honoring Glenn Britt and Sumner Redstone. Congratulations to you both.

It is somewhat ironic that I was invited to speak here tonight. But confession is good for the soul. You see, in 1992, I was an advance man for President George H.W. Bush – "41" as he is now known. As the 1992 campaign heated up in late summer, I felt that the President wasn't being fairly treated by "The Media." So, I created a bumper sticker that became his favorite stump speech prop of that campaign. He carried it with him everywhere, and it became his rallying cry. The bumper sticker was bright red and said, "Annoy the Media; Re-elect Bush." Of course, neither happened. He lost. And the media was delighted -- delighted to have a fresh new story to report on in the form of Bill Clinton. Amusingly, a few months later, after his health care plan was scuttled and the Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia pulled his poll numbers down, the Clinton White House co-opted my slogan with their own bumper sticker as they lamented their press coverage. Theirs said: "Annoy the Media; Support President Clinton."

Either way, it seems that someone is always trying to annoy the media. Or is it that the media is annoying us? And how should we define "The Media" these days anyway? But that discussion is for another time. And besides, Dick Wiley advised me to "keep it light." So, hopefully, I won't annoy you too much tonight.

I just started as a FCC commissioner on June 1st. The most common question I get asked is, “what is your pet issue?” I suppose that I’ve adopted the poor, beleaguered private sector as one of my causes. There are times when I think that the private sector needs a foster parent at least.

But the overarching issue for me is: freedom. Freedom. The power of even the idea of freedom is amazing. In fact, my very first vote as a commissioner was to help TV Marti strengthen its ability to broadcast messages of freedom and hope into Cuba. Shortly thereafter, Fidel Castro got sick.

But, in all seriousness, I trust free people acting within free markets to make better decisions than those of us in government. For the most part, government should do all that it can to get out of the way and to remove barriers to entry. However, there are times when the government should address market failure so new entrepreneurial ideas have a chance to compete in the market place and succeed or fail on their own merits -- and their own merits alone. Any remedies applied to market failure should be narrowly-tailored, and sunseted, to maximize freedom for all market players, especially consumers.

When it comes to the freedom of all Americans, this Thursday marks an important event. On October 19th, in Virginia we will commemorate the 225th anniversary of the Americans’ victory over the British at Yorktown. On that crisp autumn day in 1781, as the vanquished British troops withdrew from the battlefield, they marched to the tune of "The World Turned Upside Down." And for the British, the Old World had been turned upside down. But for freedom and democracy, the New World had been turned right side up.

George Washington and his ragtag band of freedom fighters won largely because of their belief that the dissemination of self-evident truths could shatter the walls of tyranny. They laid the foundation of a new nation built upon the twin cornerstones of free markets and free ideas -- for all.

At the heart of the ideals of the fledging United States was a profound commitment to the freedom of speech -- the freedom to communicate. No agency has more of an effect on the preservation and promotion of this freedom than the Federal Communications Commission.

With the advent of new technologies, the Old World of communications has been turned upside down. But these advances have turned the New World right side up for freedom, democracy and capitalism. The opportunities that await us over the horizon are boundless. I can't think of a more exciting time to be serving on the FCC than right now.

But as we enjoy the new fruits brought forth by our hard-won freedoms, we must remember that with each enumerated freedom comes solemn responsibility. With each right, an obligation. We must be careful not to abuse our freedoms. We must remain true to our liberties in the pursuit of virtue. We all must work within our free society to improve the human condition.

As the father of two young children with a third on the way, Jennifer and I think about how "The Media" will shape them. How will what they see and hear affect their lives? Their personalities? Their values?

Not coincidentally, we may be approaching another crossroads regarding the regulation of content. Some argue that the market place has failed to protect children

from crude and harmful content and that additional government intervention is needed. Tonight, I ask that we continue to work together to strive toward more private sector solutions to this important challenge. For instance, our recent public/private partnership on children's television should be applauded. But please keep in mind that all five members of the FCC – and their kids -- are watching. In the absence of responsible self-regulation, government-mandated regulation is sure to fill the vacuum that is left behind.

But now I am no longer keeping it light; rather I'm getting a bit heavy. But before we part ways tonight, let's all pledge to keep the "Spirit of Yorktown" alive by working together - every day - toward enriching the lives - and liberty - of all Americans.

Well, hopefully, I haven't annoyed The Media Institute too much tonight.

Again, congratulations to our honorees this evening. And Jennifer and I thank you for having us over for a wonderful dinner!